

ДИСКУСІЯ / DISCUSSION

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**PRESIDENT OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC MILOŠ ZEMAN –
RUSSIAN AGENT OF INFLUENCE
IN THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT?**

In November 2013 a social rebellion (EuroMajdan, Euro-Revolution, Revolution of 2013, the dignity revolution, Ukrainian spring) was held against President Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine, after he had refused to sign an association agreement with the European Union (EU) during the 3rd Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. Earlier Russia had threatened him to close its market for Ukrainian goods and raise prices of Russian energy raw materials for Ukraine. After an unsuccessful attempt of the Ukrainian authorities to resolve the social conflict by force, the EU and Russian diplomacy helped to reach the agreement between the opposition and President Yanukovich on 21 February. However, he did not intend to respect the agreement and went to Russia, where he announced his return to power. On 22 February 2014 the Supreme Council of Ukraine deprived him of the office. On 23 February the chair of the Supreme Council and acting president Oleksander Turczynow announced new presidential elections and Ukraine's readiness to conclude an association agreement with the EU and build good relations with Russia. On 23 February the new Ukrainian authorities canceled the language act that granted significant privileges to national minorities in their densely populated settlements.

The events in Ukraine were used by Russia to intervene in its internal affairs. On the pretext of protecting the Russian-speaking population and the autonomy of Crimea Russia annexed it in 2014 (Nationality, 2001)¹. The Tatars of Crimea opposed against the Russian occupation. They reminded the world that Crimea had become Russian because of ethnic cleansing under Stalin (Novinky.cz 400440, 2016; Novinky.cz 394863, 2016). Russian authorities and mass media started anti-Ukrainian propaganda about the governments of nationalists and fascists in Kiev. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian Duma, Alexei Pushkov, described it as "Bandera's democracy" (Novinky.cz 328707, 2014). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke about a threat to the Russian, Hungarian and Czech minorities from the Ukrainian nationalists (Novinky.cz 335526, 2014). The Russian media began to recall the historical and ethnic diversity of Ukraine's border regions, which used to belong to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania. They proclaimed that the national minorities who lived there were afraid of the outbreak of Ukrainian nationalism. They said that during World War 1 and World War 2 Ukrainian nationalists had cooperated with the Germans and together they had murdered Jews, Poles and Russians. They claimed that Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece protested against the nationalist politics of Kiev (Novinky.cz 328678, 2014; Novinky.cz 367331, 2015). The Russian Duma and media called on President Vladimir Putin to force Kiev to comply with the Council of Europe's decisions towards national minorities and human

rights. They wanted the Ukrainian authorities to cease their anti-Russian policy when they did not condemn the destruction of Russian and Soviet monuments in Ukraine and glorified Ukrainian nationalists (Novinky.cz 328707, 2014). Russia believed that the best protection of the rights of national minorities in Ukraine would be the transformation of Ukraine into a federal state (Novinky.cz 372404, 2015; Novinky.cz 372625, 2015). The leader of Russia's Liberal-Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovskiy threatened Ukraine with the partition of its lands by Russia, Poland, Hungary and Romania if it rejected the postulate (Novinky.cz 331281, 2014). He also warned the western neighbours of Ukraine and the Baltic states that their support for the nationalist-fascist authorities in Kiev could result in Russian military intervention (Novinky.cz 344883, 2014). Russia's strategic goal was to stop Ukraine from integrating with the EU and NATO (TVN24 490099, 2014; TVN24 490269, 2014).

The Czech government recognized the new government in Kiev, and regarded the removal of Yanukovich from power as constitutional. They recognized Russia's annexation of Crimea as a violation of international law and aggression against a sovereign state (Novinky.cz 328931, 2014). In their opinion the referendum of the Crimean Russians served Russia to legalize its aggression. The Czech government recalled that under the Budapest 1994 memorandum, Russia, the United States and Great Britain pledged to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. (Novinky.cz 329122, 2014). The Czech authorities were of the opinion that Russia supported military separatists in Donbas (Novinky.cz 335767, 2014). They supported NATO's financial and advisory assistance to the Ukrainian army in order to reform it, but excluded any military assistance (Novinky.cz 346856, 2014). Social Democratic Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka emphasized that after the experience of Munich (1938) and the intervention of the Warsaw Pact (1968) the Czech Republic could not accept any unilateral actions of powers that violated territorial integrity and sovereignty of neighbouring states. He was of the opinion that the Kosovo precedent had no connection with the Crimean case, because of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Martinek, Rovenský, 2014).

The Czech government was constitutionally responsible for the Czech foreign policy (Gudlewicz, 2002: 90-93; Antoszewski, 2005: 19-22). However, Miloš Zeman², elected in the first direct presidential election in 2013, did not intend to limit himself to courtesy representation of the state. At the beginning of 2014 he opted for NATO troops entering Ukraine in order to deter Russia if it wanted to

¹ Census (2001) – Autonomous Republic of Crimea: Russians 1.18 mln (58.3%), Ukrainians 492.2 thousand (24.3%), Crimean Tatars 243.4 thousand (12%), Belarusians 29.2 thousand (1.4%), other Tatars 11 thousand (0.5%), Armenians 8.7 thousand (0.4%), Jews 4.5 thousand (0.2%), Poles 3.8 thousand (0.2%), Moldovans 3.7 thousand (0.2%), Azers 3.7 thousand (0.2%).

² Born in 1944, graduated from the Prague School of Economics, member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (1968-1970). During the Velvet Revolution in 1989 in the Civic Forum, in 1990 in the Federal Assembly, from 1992 in the Czech Social Democratic Party, its chairman from 1993, from 1996 chairman of the Chamber of Deputies, prime minister (1998-2002), in 2003 he lost the presidential election, in 2007 he joined the Social Democratic Party, in 2009 he founded the Party of Civic Rights-Zeman's people, in 2010 his party did not enter the parliament, president (2013-2018), he announced his candidacy for the second term.

annex its territory. He was afraid of an open war between Russia and Ukraine as it could lead to the isolation of Russia by the United States and the EU. This would have a negative impact on the political and economic situation of the Czech Republic, for which Russia was an important economic partner. In protest against Russia's involvement in the activities of the separatists in Donbas, the president, the prime minister and the chairmen of both parliamentary chambers did not participate in the banquet celebrating the Victory Day at the Russian Embassy in Prague on 9 May 2014. It was an annual tradition for the representatives of the Czech authorities to participate in it (Lang, 2014a; Novinky.cz 335637, 2014). The banquet was attended by former President Václav Klaus, the vice chairman of the Chamber of Deputies and the leader of the Czech Communist Party Vojtěch Filip and several Communist and Social Democrat deputies, former Prime Minister Jiří Rusnok and a few former ministers in Zeman's government between 1998-2002. (Danda, 2014; Novinky.cz 335767). It was Zeman's last anti-Russian protest.

After the "peaceful" annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014, Zeman claimed that Crimea was lost for Ukraine. For historical and ethnic reasons no one intended to take it back from Russia by force. Crimea was to belong to Russia because Russia had lost it in 1954 by the ill-considered decision of then-USSR leader Nikita Khrushchev (Novinky.cz 329106, 2014). Zeman believed that the separatist actions of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea were indirectly affected by the West's recognition of Kosovo's independence (2008). He argued that the only solution to the problems in Ukraine was its federalisation (Novinky.cz 329628, 2014). He emphasized that the West had to respect the interests of Russia in Ukraine, Moldova and the Caucasus. Zeman opposed economic sanctions against Russia, which would be as ineffective as they were against Cuba (Novinky.cz 333209, 2014).

President Zeman became involved in the Russian propaganda on national relations in Ukraine. In March 2014 the representatives of the Czech minority in Volhynia asked Zeman to help them in repatriation to their home country. The president exerted pressure on the government to bring all those willing to come to the country as soon as possible. In the second half of 2014 the requests from the Czechs in Volhynia intensified due to the anti-terrorist action of the Ukrainian troops in Donbas. They were afraid of the Russian-Ukrainian war and military recruitment. The Czech government did not see a reason for a quick repatriation, because the Czech minority was not harmed. They did not want to take extraordinary actions that would fit into the anti-Ukrainian policy of Russia (Novinky.cz 330671, 2014; Novinky.cz 347469, 2014; Novinky.cz 349368, 2014). On Facebook Zeman wrote that he did not want to talk to any Ukrainian for whom Stepan Bandera was a national hero (Zeman, 2015). He described the processions of Ukrainian nationalist parties the All-Ukrainian Union "Freedom" and the Right Sector with a portrait of Stepan Bandera (he compared him to Reinhardt Heydrich) as Nazi. He claimed that the demonstrators raised the slogans of death to Poles, Jews and communists. His anti-Ukrainian speeches were widely cited by the Russian press and praised by the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Duma Pushkov. In the Czech Republic the public demanded from Zeman to disclose sources of information on the internal situation in Ukraine (Švec, 2015a).

During the Ukrainian presidential campaign in May 2014 Zeman opted for electing a Ukrainian president who would end the civil war and prevent a conflict with Russia. He expected that the military option would be rejected and

the domestic crisis as well as the crisis in relations with Russia would be resolved politically. He believed that Julia Timoshenko could not guarantee it (Novinky.cz 337049, 2014). After the election of Petr Poroshenko Zeman advised him to run peace talks with all sides of the conflict in Ukraine in consultation with Russia. He offered a Czech mediation mission. He criticized the EU that, instead of the EU diplomacy, individual EU states or the Weimar Triangle states negotiated with Russia about Ukraine (Novinky.cz 340040, 2014).

Zeman publicly claimed after Russian propaganda that the conflict in Ukraine was a civil war. He did not exclude Russia's support for the separatists in Donbas. He claimed there was no evidence of Russia's soldiers being there. The Czech president argued that if in 1968 the Soviet army had 150,000 soldiers during the invasion in Czechoslovakia, then in Ukraine it would have to be even bigger. At that time, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka and Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický reported that at least 5,000 Russian soldiers were fighting in Donbas. Zeman called on the Ukrainian authorities to end the internal conflict in a peaceful way. Otherwise he predicted the Ukrainian-Russian war, the destabilization of Ukraine strongly linked to the Russian economy and the long-lasting crisis between Russia and the West. He was convinced that cooperation with Russia was necessary to fight the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and to fight international terrorism (Novinky.cz 346926, 2014). At the same time, in public speeches he consistently opposed economic sanctions against Russia. In an interview for the Russian ITAR-TASS in June 2014 Zeman stated that he could see no reasons for the political and economic isolation of Russia by the United States and the EU. He opted for intensified economic, investment and tourism cooperation between the Czech Republic and Russia. He called on the EU to abolish visas for Russian citizens and called Russia to increase its investment in the Czech Republic (Novinky.cz 339928, 2014). He blamed the separatists for firing a Malaysian aircraft in August 2014 over eastern Ukraine, so that the West would not accuse Russia of it, which would result in its international isolation. He was of the opinion that the EU openness to political, economic and tourism contacts would be conducive to an agreement with Russia (Novinky.cz 342872, 2014). On the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War 1 Zeman urged NATO, the EU and Russia to jointly resolve the conflict in Ukraine (Novinky.cz 340237, 2014).

At the end of September 2014 Zeman took part in a four-day conference "Dialogue of Civilization" organized in Rhodes by the president of Russian Railway Vladimir Jakunin, a close associate of Putin. In his speech Zeman argued that all sanctions against Russia should be abolished because of the situation in Ukraine. He referred to the example of Cuba, where despite forty years of sanctions, Fidel Castro's regime did not fall. He reckoned that the civil war in Ukraine was a local crisis. For Europe a much important problem was the war on terrorism in which Russia was the ally of the West. He stated that without the West's cooperation with Russia, Ukraine could end up as a fallen state like Somalia, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic, Afghanistan, which were the breeding ground for global terrorism (Novinky.cz 348872, 2014). He supported Russia's intervention in Syria, which could unite Russia with the West in the war against the Islamic State ("The New York Times", 2017). In an interview for "Bild" Zeman argued that the unity of the United States, the EU, Russia and China in the fight against global terrorism was more important than the local crisis in Ukraine. Western powers must not let the Cold War with Russia return as it would be

a threat to global peace (Novinky.cz 353858, 2014). At the Asia-Europe Summit (ASEM) in October 2014 in Milan, an informal meeting between Zeman and Lavrov was held, and the main topic of their conversation was Ukraine (Novinky.cz 350784, 2014).

During a press conference at the NATO summit in Newport, UK (4-5 September 2014), Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt publicly asked Zeman, who demanded evidence from NATO and EU on Russia's military involvement in Ukraine, whether the Czech Republic had any special services, and if so, he should ask them (Novinky.cz 346856, 2014). The Czech intelligence had evidence of the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine (Novinky.cz 349559, 2014). Czech Ambassador in Kiev Ivan Počuch reported that Russia supported the separatists in Donbas politically, propagandistically, financially and militarily. Putin treated the EU and NATO as geopolitical rivals (Novinky.cz 346259, 2014).

At the Leipzig meeting in October 2014, where the Presidents of Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary commemorated the 25th anniversary of anti-communist demonstrations in the former GDR, once again Zeman claimed that there was a civil war in Ukraine. He stated that the involvement of Germany, Italy, the USSR and France in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was not recognized as their invasion of Spain. His view was absolutely different from the positions of the other presidents and former US Secretary of State James Baker (Novinky.cz 350071, 2014).

On the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution on November 17, 2014, a demonstration against the pro-Soviet policy of Zeman was held in Prague when he opposed calling Putin's regime "Brezhnev regime". He refused to describe the 2013 revolution in Ukraine as libertarian and democratic or compare it to the 1989 revolution in Czechoslovakia. He even stated that the then nationalist and anti-democratic demonstrations of the Ukrainian nationalists had led to the outbreak of the civil war. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry handed the Czech ambassador in Kiev a protest note on the anti-Ukrainian statements of the Czech president. The Ukrainian press wrote sarcastically that just in case he should book an air ticket to Rostov on Don. The Russian press praised him for an accurate assessment of the Ukrainian crisis as a civil war (Novinky.cz 353840, 2014; Novinky.cz 354078, 2014).

In an interview for the Czech newspaper *Právo* in January 2015 Zeman stated that Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk was "the prime minister of the war". He contrasted him with the peaceful policy of President Poroshenko. In his view, Yatsenyuk was not seeking a peaceful solution to the internal crisis and was seeking a confrontation with Russia. He repeated that the removal of President Yanukovich was unlawful (Novinky.cz 357720, 2015). The Ukrainian authorities were outraged with his words. In response to the protest of the Ukrainian Embassy in Prague the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Czech foreign policy was led by the government, not the president. On the other hand, the Russian mass media praised Zeman for his independence of views on Ukraine (Švec, 2015b).

When the West demonstratively refused to take part in the Russian celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the victory over Germany in Moscow, Zeman did not intend to succumb to internal and international criticism of his pro-Russian policy (Novinky.cz 357660, 2015; Novinky.cz 351883, 2014). Zeman's visit in Moscow was criticized by the American ambassador in the Czech Republic, Andrew Schapiro, for breaking the West's unity against the aggressor. The Czech president considered this to be an

interference with the internal affairs of the host country and violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961). He announced that he would not see the ambassador anymore (Novinky.cz 367635, 2015). Undaunted by criticism Zeman argued that Russia was not a threat to any EU or NATO state, because it might lead to a war. In his opinion Russia did not intend to annex Eastern Ukraine because it would not be economically profitable. Before leaving for Moscow in an interview for ITAR-TASS he said that Prime Minister Yatsenyuk hampered the peaceful policy of President Poroshenko. He claimed again that the EU sanctions had been harmful not only for Russia. He opted for the abolition of the sanctions and for the abolition of the EU visas for Russian citizens (Vilček, 2014). He announced that in twenty years Russia would become a member of the EU (Novinky.cz 368679, 2016). Against the position of the government and opposition parties, Zeman went to Moscow, where the EU states were represented by the President of Cyprus and Prime Minister of Slovakia Robert Fico. In Moscow Zeman emphasized the need for the cooperation between the West and Russia in the fight against international terrorism, which was more important than the local crisis in Ukraine (Novinky.cz 368703, 2015; "The Wall Street Journal", 2015). In a conversation with Zeman on 9 May 2015 Putin praised him for his independent view of the relations between the West and Russia. He regarded Zeman to be a politician that brought together the two sides of the dispute. The Czech president sought to increase the economic cooperation between the Czech Republic and Russia. As for Ukraine, the two presidents opted for the implementation of Minsk peace agreements (Novinky.cz 369089, 2015; Wilk et al., 2016). Zeman thought that after the fighting in Donbas had ended, the sanctions should be abolished before the end of 2015 (Novinky.cz 369099, 2015).

The right-wing opposition (TOP 09 and ODS) believed that the Czech Republic was obliged to condemn the aggression of a stronger state against the weaker and defend international law, democracy and freedom in international relations. The EU sanctions did not serve the Czech economy, but it was impossible not to react to the aggression of Russia (Novinky.cz 246485, 2014). After President Zeman's visits to Rhodes and Moscow, the opposition demanded that the government should prevent him from pursuing foreign policy incompatible with the Czech ration of the state (Lang, 2014b; Martinek, 2015; Novinky.cz 369270, 2015). They advocated the territorial integrity of Ukraine and its right to join the EU. Russia did not have the right to Crimea and Donbas as Germany did not have the right to the Czech borderland in 1938. The opposition also emphasized that giving the borderland to Germany in 1938 did not save Europe. After Chechnya, Georgia and Moldova, Ukraine was another victim of Putin's imperialist policy, modeled on Stalin's (Novinky.cz 3258-24130, 2014). Zeman became Putin's propagandist when he saw a civil war in Ukraine, not Russian soldiers. The opposition warned the government and the president against the Czech Republic being recognised as the "fifth column" of Russia in Western structures (Lang, 2014c; Lang, 2014d).

Prime Minister Sobotka and Foreign Minister Lubomír Zaorálek carried unofficial fights against pro-Russian Zeman, who constantly spoke against the government's political line (K. Brožová, 2015; "The Financial Times", 2015). However, the prime minister and the head of the Social Democratic party could not disregard the pro-Zeman fraction that threatened to split in the event of a political isolation of the president. The ruling coalition parties of KDU-ČSL and ANO were for cutting the president's funds

on foreign travels (Palata, 2015; Novinky.cz 364933, 2015; Novinky.cz 366159, 2015) Zeman's pro-Soviet policy was supported by the Communists (KSCM), who praised him for his great contribution to friendly Czech-Russian relations (Novinky.cz 349559, 2014; Novinky.cz 369129, 2015). Also some Social Democrats supported his Eastern policy (Bělohorský, 2014; Pehe, 2015).

At international conferences with Russia Zeman always met Putin or Lavrov and manifested his pro-Russian position (Zpravy.idnes.cz 081443, 2017). One may ask why the Czech president has pro-Russian views. Is he just a useful idiot or a Russian agent of influence? Let us look at history and sociology of politics. Two other presidents Edvard Beneš (1935-1938, 1939-1948) and Václav Klaus (2003-2013), Putin's supporter, had Pro-Russian views. In the 19th century the Czechs began to perceive Russia as their defenders against the Germans, proclaiming the Slavic idea to break down Austro-Hungary. During World War 2 in Central Europe the Czechs were the only nation that looked forward to being liberated from the German occupation by the Red Army. In the interwar period, Czechoslovakia was the only Central European country where nearly one million Communist Party legally operated. After 1989, the Czech communists did not resign to use the word "communist" in the name of the party, and in the parliamentary elections they usually reached the 2nd or 3rd place.

In 2002 Zeman ceased to be prime minister. In 2003 he lost the presidential election to Klaus and withdrew from active politics. In 2007 after the conflict with the then leadership of the Czech Social Democratic Party he made secession with his followers. He spent time fishing in a small town where he lived (Nové Veselí). Even then he was visited by Russian ambassador to the Czech Republic Sergei Kisielew. He also maintained regular contacts with pro-Russian businessmen Martin Nejedlý (Lidovky.cz, 2014; K. Mouchová, 2014; Hlidacipes.org, 2016; J. Spurný, 2016; The New York Times, 2017)¹ and Miroslav Šlouf (Zpravy.idnes.cz, 215422, 2008; Zpravy.idnes.cz, 222844, 2008)². They both financed the foundation of the Party of Civic Rights-Zeman's people in 2009, which became a trampoline for Zeman's presidency. Among the party leaders was also Vratislav Mynář (Czech Republic, 2013, NBÚ, 2016)³. One of Zeman's "old friend" was former KGB

¹ Born in 1966, former athlete, since the 1990s he has been conducting business activities on a European scale, he worked in Russia for many years (trading cars between Germany and Russia), in 2007 he became the executive of Lukoil Aviation Czech, since 2009 in the Party of Civic Rights-Zeman's people, in 2014 he became the party's deputy chairman, in 2013 he became a member of Zeman's election team, he financed Zeman's party and his presidential campaign, with the support of Lukoil as the Czech press claimed, he did business with Šlouf; in 2014 he became an informal economic advisor to President Zeman as he could not obtain a security certificate. British and American intelligence suspects him of cooperation with the Russian service. There is no information about his long-term activity in Russia, his cooperation with Lukoil, his education or business outside the Czech Republic. He knows many influential Russian politicians. He accompanies Zeman on his foreign visits.

² Born in 1948, graduated from the Prague School of Economics, member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (1975-1991), president of the Socialist Youth Union, member of the Czech Social Democratic Party (1994-2009), ran its election campaigns (1998-2002), chairman of the advisors of Prime Minister Zeman. In 2009 together with Zeman he founded the Party of Civic Rights-Zeman's people, in 2013 he ran his presidential campaign, since 1990 he has been involved in business, including Slavia Consulting which cooperated with Lukoil.

³ Born in 1967 in Kiev, politician and entrepreneur, since 2013 head of President Zeman's office, has not received a security cer-

agent Vladimir Jakunin, former president of Russian Railways (2005-2015) and since 2015 a representative of the Kaliningrad District in the Federation Council. In 2014, due to the crisis in Ukraine he has been sanctioned in Australia and the United States (Treasury, 2014; "The Financial Times", 2015) In July 2016 in Berlin Jakunin opened the scientific institute "Dialogue of Civilization", financed by his St. Andrew's Foundation. His wife presides over his other foundation called the "Dialogue of Civilization," founded in 2002, which organizes annual scientific conferences in Rhodes (DW.com, 19372829, 2016). Former head of Czech intelligence Karel Randák cautiously stated that many advisers to the Social Democratic Prime Minister Sobotka and President Zeman had pro-Russian views ("The New York Times", 2017).

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